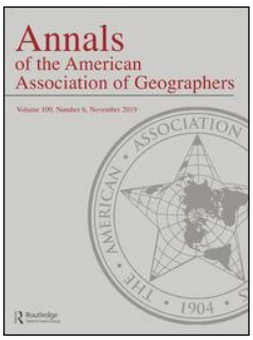

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Maroon Socioterritorial Movements

Ana Laura Zavala Guillen

School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, UK

Maroon communities, or communities of descendants of fugitives from slavery, have been long-lasting examples of social movements pursuing political goals through the production and mobilization of space. They have been largely forgotten in academic analyses, however, which, in Latin America, are primarily focused on peasants and indigenous movements. Therefore, drawing on socioterritorial movements readings and maroon studies, this article analyzes how maroon-descendant communities have produced territory in both urban and rural spaces—including areas of forced displacement—locally and transnationally, to survive hegemonies deeply rooted in the legacy of slavery and to achieve political aims. These communities unsettle binary categories of rural and urban socioterritorial movements and monolithic visions of antistate struggle. This transterritorial, rural–urban appropriation of spaces resisting different powers follows the past logic of marronage to achieve freedom and security, re-creating in present times the political vision of historical maroon leaders regarding the construction of a grand Palenque in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. *Key Words: Afro-Latin American studies, marronage, socioterritorial movements, Spanish-speaking Caribbean, territory.*

The reading of socioterritorial movements constitutes an emerging southern approach to understanding geographies of social change that examines how *campesino* (small-scale farmers) and indigenous groups in Latin America produce space to achieve their political goals (Mançano Fernandes 2005; Halvorsen, Fernandes, and Torres 2019; López 2019). These studies emphasize actors who mobilize counterhegemonic or subaltern territories that resist capitalism and the state (Mançano Fernandes 2005, 2009, 2010; Bryan 2012; Zibechi 2012; Haesbaert 2013; Lopes de Souza 2015; Courtheyn 2018). Socioterritorial movements cannot be understood without the idea of counterhegemonic territories and vice versa. This article shows that the relationship between these two concepts cannot be fully captured without an analysis of race.

There are multiple definitions of race in scholarship produced in the Global North and from a geographical perspective (Nash 2003; P. L. Price 2010). Wade's (2008b) definition for the case of Latin American countries is useful because it highlights elements recurring in this article. He conceptualized race as a social construction that produces mixedness as well as discrimination and violence against indigenous and Black identities. In Latino societies, Whiteness and mixedness are associated with high status and development. These societies are invested in the European aspects of their origins to the exclusion of indigenous and African characteristics. Thus, explicit proximity to Europeanness (not just Whiteness) in terms of ancestry and culture is a crucial aspect of defining race in Latin America, including Blackness.

By leaving race outside the study of socioterritorial movements there is a risk of reproducing academically the colonial discourse of subaltern denial and embodying new forms of cultural violence against Afro-Latin American groups (Galtung 1996; Quijano 2000). There is a general understanding that counterhegemonic territories have been initiated by campesino and indigenous movements, who have inspired new social movements in Latin America (Zibechi, cited in Streule and Schwarz 2019). For example, following the economic crisis that affected Argentina in the 2000s, organized unemployed workers have replicated campesino and indigenous peoples' strategies of space making as a form of struggle (Mason-Deese, Habermehl, and Clare 2019). In this sense, the analysis of socioterritorial movements has excluded some of the principal historical actors in spatial resistance—Afro-descendant groups—and is in danger of becoming blind to race (Lamborghini, Geler, and Guzmán 2017; Wade 2017; de la Fuente and Andrews 2018).

With some exceptions in Brazil (Pérez-Wilke 2014; da Costa Segovia et al. 2015), the Colombian

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Pacific region (Escobar 2008; Oslender 2016), and Ecuador (Vela-Almeida et al. 2020), Blackness, and in particular the maroon heritage of specific Afro-descendant communities, has been excluded from the analyses of counterhegemonic territories. Marronage was the act of enslaved people escaping from cities, large farms, and mines to build communities away from those who claimed ownership over them in the Americas and the Caribbean (R. Price 1983; de Groot 1985; Navarrete 2001; Roberts 2015; Krug 2018). This article centers those struggles by bringing together socioterritorial movement studies and maroon studies in Latin America to overcome this blind spot regarding marronage as a spatial practice of political resistance. As Bledsoe (2017) explained, maroon spatialities were the earliest examples of both Black geographies and Black autonomy in the American hemisphere. This article demonstrates that maroon geographies were also among the earliest examples of counterhegemonic territories in Latin America.

Black studies have underscored how domination and resistance have been two forces that have coproduced Black geographies—for instance, in the British-speaking Caribbean (Noxolo and Featherstone 2014). From a geographical, Afro-Latin American studies perspective, however, I am interested in understanding how the production of territories has made political resistance possible for maroon-descendant communities. In so doing, this article contributes by applying the concept of the socioterritorial movement to the spatial resistance exercised by maroons and their descendants to better grasp the historical development and political purpose of maroon territorial practices in Latin America. It does so by using the case study of San Basilio de Palenque, a maroon-descendant community or *palenque* located in northern Colombia, which was part of a process of marronage that started in approximately 1580. *Palenque* is the term used in the Colombian context to identify communities of fugitives from slavery. It is also how San Basilio de Palenque is familiarly named by its members, who are also known as *palenqueros*.

After several attempts at extermination by the colonial authorities, the community reached a peace agreement with the Spaniards in 1714. This granted the maroons both territory and a recognition of their freedom, unlike the remaining enslaved people of the New Kingdom of Granada (Navarrete Peláez 2008; Cassiani Herrera 2014). The community then became a *poblazion*: a town of fugitives freed from slavery recognized by the colonial regime. Since its constitution as a colonial town, San Basilio de Palenque has undergone a process of uprooting in times of armed conflict and of peace that has led to the creation of new territories in both rural and urban areas. These have been formed locally in Colombia but also transnationally in Panama and Venezuela and can be understood as a form of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that, as Haesbaert (2013) argued, involves the loss of subaltern control of territories but also the production of new territories and new networks of territories. For example, the Gauchos from southern Brazil have migrated to the north and to Paraguay, creating forms of multiterritoriality and transterritoriality. Here, the prefix *trans* implies that there are many territories, but they are not disconnected. Transterritoriality highlights the overlap and fluid transit between spaces, such as an informal settlement, a city, or the state. For the maroon-descendant communities considered here, these modes of transterritoriality constitute a form of political resistance, as dreamed of by their ancestors in colonial times.

Overall, examining the different ways in which maroon-descendant territories in Latin America are produced significantly expands socioterritorial movements as a category of analysis of geographies of social change beyond its current uses. I then highlight San Basilio de Palenque's spatial strategy of producing multiple territories as part of its colonial history of survival. The following sections develop the idea of the production of these spaces of political resistance in rural and urban areas within and beyond Colombia's borders as a transterritorial network. The final section describes the ability of this network to resist the state and capital, as well as countering other hegemonies based on the legacy of slavery in Latin America and following the ancestral dream of building the grand Palenque in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

Original archival research on the colonial history of the community was conducted in the General Archive of the Indies (GAI) in Seville in 2016. Empirical findings were also obtained through three participatory mapping exercises in San Basilio de Palenque and Panama City. This contributes to detailing the modern reduction in the ancestral territory of San Basilio de Palenque in the Montes de María that has prompted reterritorialization.

Moreover, forty-seven semistructured interviews were conducted in Spanish (with twenty-seven men and twenty women of various ages). Elders who had extensive knowledge of the territory were especially considered for interviews given their expertise on the evolution of the community. All interviews were conducted from November 2015 to April 2016 and in July 2017 and February 2020 in the following locations:

1. San Basilio de Palenque.
2. La Pista and Rafael de La Bonguita, which were formed following forced displacement by the armed conflict in 2001.
3. Cartagena de Indias.
4. Panama City.

In these two cities I researched districts (also known as urban *palenques*) populated by members of San Basilio de Palenque.[1] The barrios (districts) in Panama highlighted that their displacement is not only within Colombia but also transnational. In the empirical detail of this article, information is drawn from the archive and participatory mapping is indicated as such; otherwise, it comes from the semistructured interviews.

Lamborghini, Geler, and Guzmán (2017) pointed out that scholarship in Afro-Latin American studies has mostly been written by White academics. Since the 1940s, however, Afro-descendant scholars have also produced this literature, although with less legitimation and recognition (de la Fuente and Andrews 2018). Phenotypically White, I am a *mestiza*, an Argentine-born, European and Peruvian indigenous descendant; the latter, in the Argentinean racial order, means being part of the *negros*. The expression "Argentinean negros" is used to identify in a racist manner the less than 50 percent of the population with self-declared Afro-descendants; indigenous descendants; the low-income population in the provinces and urban peripheral settlements with brown skin; migrants from Bolivia, Paraguay, and Perú (Alberto and Elena 2016; Gordillo 2016); and, since the late 1990s, African migrants, mostly men from Senegal (Zubrzycki 2019). The existence of "negros" is politically and socially unbearable for "white Argentina" because it conspires against a racial project rooted in European migration and values (Gordillo 2016; see also Alberto and Elena 2016).

The tensions of my identity as a mestiza inhabited this research by unsettling how history has been taught, with no place for Afro-descendants, a little room for indigenous people, and a colonial-tinted view of Latin American society. Despite my mixed background, the community in San Basilio de Palenque acknowledged me as White, a well-educated person from a Western European university, and a human rights lawyer. These privileges allowed me to participate in debates on strategies of community mobilization for land restitution, which are commonly male dominated and restricted to community members.

Through the Lens of Socioterritorial Movements

The analysis of new social movements in Latin America is characterized by the diversity of its subjects, from barrios to *blocos* (Black carnival clubs) to more politicized and traditionally organized groups (Friedmann 1989; Davis 1999; Choup 2008; Chesters 2012; Wabgou et al. 2012; Dixon 2014; Zibechi 2014; Gahman, Penados, and Greenidge 2020). Literature in this field has progressively shone more light on how these groups have found innovative ways to mobilize radically (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Becker 2014). These involve challenging both neoliberal and progressive governments and resisting all types of subordination without aspiring to take state power (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Becker 2014; Inclán 2018).

With a vision of territory as a hierarchical and violent overlapping between the state and subaltern spaces (Halvorsen 2018), the concept of the socioterritorial movement first appeared in the work of geographers Mançano Fernandes (2000) and Martin (2001) on the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Terra* (MST; Martin and Mançano Fernandes 2004). The MST is the most significant landless peasant social movement in Brazil (Hoddy and Ensor 2018). For Mançano Fernandes and Martin, every social movement produces physical and symbolic spaces. Socioterritorial movements, however, have the political goal of occupying space in a class struggle against globalization, neoliberalism, and homogenizing forms of the use of land and natural resources (Mançano Fernandes 2000). They pursue alternative ways of living in their territories through the creation of counterhegemonic economic and social relationships (Martin and Mançano Fernandes 2004).

The production of alternative spaces as a final political goal is the result of the territorialization,

reterritorialization, and deterritorialization experienced by socioterritorial movements that operate in restricted spaces or navigate across different regions (Martin 2001; Mançano Fernandes 2005). Examples of socioterritorial movements have also been identified in urban contexts and include social groups struggling for housing in Sao Paulo (Pedon 2013), forcibly displaced peasants in Medellin (López 2019), unemployed workers in greater Buenos Aires (Mason-Deese, Habermehl, and Clare 2019), and Afro-Colombians confronting deterritorialization in the port city of Buenaventura (Lombard, Hernández-García, and Salgado-Ramírez 2021).

The increasing interest in producing socioterritorial analyses of grassroots organizations has led to their common characteristics being identified in comparative studies. Halvorsen, Fernandes, and Torres (2019, 1456) pointed out four "axes" that transform a social movement into a socioterritorial one by examining the MST in Brazil and the Tupac Amaru Neighborhood Organization. This latter organization is a social movement with influence in cities in northwest Argentina with a populist and strong female indigenous leadership. As mentioned earlier, the primary characteristic of a socioterritorial movement is the importance of territory for achieving its political objectives. Second, territory nurtures group identity, provoking the emergence of distinctive political identities. Third, territory offers a space of political socialization and a source of new values and leadership. Fourth, institutions and infrastructures emerge in the new territories (Halvorsen, Fernandes, and Torres 2019).

The production of alternative subaltern territories has also been highlighted in geographical scholarship that analyzes spatial practices as resistance against the state in Latin America (Mançano Fernandes 2005, 2009, 2010; Bryan 2012; Zibechi 2012; Haesbaert 2013; Lopes de Souza 2015; Courtheyn 2018). Halvorsen (2018, 2) described the coexistence in the same space of hegemonic or state-based territories and "bottom-up," grassroots territories created by marginalized groups as involving "overlapping and entangled territories" immersed in a hierarchal and violent relationship. Mançano Fernandes (2009) also described multiscale and contesting spatialities among state-based territory, capitalist territories, and the territories of social movements understood as "non-capitalist islands" (Zibechi 2012, 106).

Thus, the territories of subalterns have been considered as spaces of divergence (Lopes de Souza 2015) and resistance (Escobar 2008; Oslender 2008, 2016; Mançano Fernandes 2009, 2010; Agnew and Oslender 2010; Bryan 2012; Porto Gonçalves 2012; Zibechi 2012). Examples are the *caracoles* of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, Mexico; popular assemblies and factories occupied by unemployed workers following the economic crisis in Argentina in 2001; the territories of the Aymaras, an indigenous peasant movement in Bolivia; and collective and family-run orchards of unemployed workers in Uruguay following the economic crisis in 2002 (Zibechi 2012). These territories are part of struggles to establish subversive economic, social, and political relationships (Lopes de Souza 2015). Some literature, though, has challenged the view of social movements' territories as breaches in the system of domination (Zibechi 2014). It highlights how social movements are also shaped and permeated by capital and the patriarchal system (Asher 2007; Paschel 2018). There is also ambiguity in the relationship between counterhegemonic territories and the state. Clare, Habermehl, and Mason-Deese (2018) explained that the production of territory from below is not always in resistance against the state. It can also be part of a contested relationship that might involve affinity and harmony with political authorities. For example, migrant organizing networks in Buenos Aires demand provisions from the state to sustain their own needs despite their anti-state campaigns. As will be shown in what follows, maroon-descendant movements have also learned how to play the system to survive in a context of historical racial violence.

Indigenous territorial practices are often identified as the symbolic inspiration for counterhegemonic movements in Latin America (Zibechi 2012; Schwarz and Streule 2020). In contrast, Afro-descendant struggles for space and freedom are not acknowledged as ideological sources of political resistance for current counterhegemonic territories in the region. Indeed, their territorial struggles are sometimes underestimated. For example, Offen (2003) stated that in Colombia "rural black communities had no tradition of expressing their political demands in the form of ethnic or territorial claims" (46). He attributed the push for land recognition in the Colombian Pacific to top-down support and legal change that favored recognition of ethnic rights in

the late 1980s and 1990s. Yet, maroon-descendant movements have a continuous history of the production, demand, and defense of territory since colonial times. Maroons and their descendants forced the law to recognize their territoriality in 1714 and 1921, when no legislation operated in their favor (de Friedemann 1991; Navarrete Peláez 2008). The law and the elites did not open the space for maroon territorialities. San Basilio de Palenque produced its own territories in rural, urban, and transnational spaces through nonlegal strategies.

If the construction of territories of political resistance is a popular political strategy in Latin America (Mançano Fernandes 2000), the following analysis adds to the few studies that have tried to demonstrate the role of Afro-descendant people in this process. It develops socioterritorial movements studies by analyzing maroon-descendant transterritorial resistance against racial violence as a legacy of slavery. Doing so depends on understanding race as a social category that underpins class in Latin America (Wade 2000, 2005; Gordillo 2016; Koopman 2021).

Political discourses have portrayed Latin American countries as racial democracies (Rodrigues Alves 1980; Wade 2008a, 2008b; Alberto and Hoffnung-Garskof 2018; Schwartzman 2020). Blackness as a social concern has been successfully erased from national projects, as in Argentina (Gordillo 2016; Lamborghini, Geler, and Guzmán 2017); neutralized, as in Colombia (Arocha 1998; Wade 2009); or deeply marginalized, as in Uruguay (G. R. Andrews 2014). It could be tempting to believe that the ideology of race-blindness was incomplete because indigenous people remained a concern in political discourses. They were only acknowledged as the bearers of tradition in Latin America, however (Arocha 1998), as past and not actual presences.

This political whitening has affected Latin American scholarship, and addressing indigenous resistance is insufficient for producing real decolonial geographical studies (Noxolo 2017). Therefore, historically spatializing different types of Blackness in resistance in Latin America can enrich these studies by adding new, more critical perspectives regarding race. With the exceptions of Brazil and Colombia, the study of African descendants has not paid sufficient attention to their spatial practices, an analysis of which would afford insights into contemporary strategies of political resistance (Escobar 2008; Oslender 2008, 2016; Pérez-Wilke 2014; da Costa Segovia et al. 2015; Lombard, Hernández-García, and Salgado-Ramírez 2021). The recovery in the following sections of the legacy of territorial struggle of maroon descendants in the Colombian Caribbean shows that race matters in spatial resistance in Latin America.

San Basilio de Palenque, a Maroon-Descendant Community

Whereas historical research has paid attention primarily to maroon survival in colonial times, geographical research has analyzed how this legacy has been mobilized in different manners for African descendants in daily resistance against inequality and racial discrimination (R. Price 1973, 1983; McFarlane 1986; Navarrete 2003; Cummings 2018; Krug 2018). Bledsoe (2017) described how maroon leaders in Brazil and their territories or *quilombos* are used as symbols of Black power in struggles against systemic racism to demand rights and the legal recognition of autonomous Black communities (Paschel 2018). Colonial marronage has also inspired modern escapes of African descendants fleeing from extrajudicial executions in the Pacific region of Colombia during the armed conflict (Oslender 2008).

Whereas these cases show how marronage became a source of symbolic inspiration for political and physical battles, the case of San Basilio de Palenque demonstrates how material spaces have been produced as transterritorial resistance from colonial times onward. The translocal production of maroon spaces has been taking place during peacetime and armed conflict, within and beyond Colombian borders, as entangled territories that have endured slavery and its legacy. The historical idea of the *palenque*—a place of resistance for fugitives from slavery—means that San Basilio de Palenque needs to be understood as a socioterritorial movement. Close attention to this place, however, demonstrates that San Basilio de Palenque is not a single territory, as understood by anthropological and historical approaches (Cross and de Friedemann 1979; Pérez Palomino 2002; Navarrete Peláez 2008; Cassiani Herrera 2014). Instead, different, mutually entangled territories coexist within the idea of San Basilio de Palenque.

Therefore, the sorts of multiple spatial relationships between territories described by Mançano Fernandes (2005) and Halvorsen (2018) also develop among the territories of this maroon-descendant

socioterritorial movement. These multiple relationships among different maroon-descendant territories are not violent or hierarchical, however. Maroon-descendant territories overlap with each other in collaboration and codependency. The production of multiple, entangled maroon-descendant territories in modern times responds, as in the past, to a permanent state of deterritorialization (participatory mapping exercises and interviews).

The violent passage from Africa first caused uprooting. The first colonial records of the existence of maroon territories appeared, in response, in 1580 in an area close to Cartagena de Indias: the Montes de María in the Colombian Caribbean (Navarrete Peláez 2008; Landers et al. 2015). The emergence of maroon communities was almost concomitant with the increasing slave trade in this area in the late sixteenth century as a result of the decline of the native population (Navarrete 1995, 2012).

These *palenques* resisted colonial extermination campaigns during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Where the settlements were destroyed their survivors found ways to create new communities or join existing ones, such as the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel, predecessor of San Basilio de Palenque (Navarrete Peláez 2008; Cassiani Herrera 2014). In time, this *palenque* was game-changing in the manner in which it negotiated its survival with the colonial authorities. It took advantage of its landscape while capitalizing on its large population and strategic alliances with the Catholic authorities (Zavala Guillen 2019).

Based on these strengths, the leaders of the *palenque* aspired to unify maroon resistance beyond the area of Cartagena de Indias. They aimed to include other communities of fugitives in the Spanish Caribbean, such as in Santa Marta and Panama, to gain freedom for all (GAI 1686–1693). In 1714, however, the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel changed plans and signed a peace agreement with the colonial authorities, becoming a *poblazion*, or a town under the colonial system, renamed San Basilio de Palenque. With this, the initial libertarian aspiration declined in favor of obtaining territory and anticipated freedom for the maroons of the Palenque de San Miguel Arcángel. For the colonial authorities, these recognitions were a way of blocking more escapes, protecting their property in enslaved people. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the following sections, the political goal of collective freedom and life without racial domination in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean endures in the spatial practices of the maroon descendants of the Palenque of San Miguel Arcángel, today San Basilio de Palenque.

These spatial practices to resist uprooting have been diverse. The following sections focus on the creation of communities outside the boundaries of the town of San Basilio de Palenque to achieve recognition of their rights, cope with direct and racial violence, and produce a sense of belonging in the receiving societies. These reterritoralizations show that marronage as a territorial practice is re-created in modern times with the aim of allowing maroon descendants to live, although still precariously, more freely and securely, as in the *palenques* in the past.

Entangled *Palenques*

The following sections explore how the maroon-descendant socioterritorial movement has entangled multiple rural and urban territories—various sorts of *palenques*—in Colombia and Panama to produce spaces free of the legacy of slavery. *Palenque es libre* (*Palenque* is free) is the meme (Krug 2018) that this movement aspires to re-create simultaneously in its new spaces in Colombia and Panama as a transterritorial "grand Palenque."[2]

In the new social movements literature, the transnational aspect has focused on the capacity of these groups to articulate solidarity networks worldwide (Radcliffe 2007; A. Andrews 2011; Paschel 2018; Vela-Almeida et al. 2020). This case study, however, reveals the consolidation of *palenques* outside Colombian boundaries to expand a maroon way of life wherever they go, finding economic means to protect San Basilio de Palenque's territory. For present purposes, I distinguish between urban and rural contexts, showing in conclusion their entanglement as a trans-territorial, maroon-descendant form of political resistance.

Urban *Palenques*

The urban *palenques* created by maroon descendants from San Basilio de Palenque have served political purposes while mitigating uprooting since the 1960s, when a severe drought forced *palenqueros* to migrate to Cartagena de Indias and, after the oil boom in Venezuela, to Caracas and Maracaibo. Migration to Venezuela became stronger with the

Revolución Bolivariana led by Hugo Chavez in 1999 (Magdaleno 2018). Since 2015, however, with the progressive decline of the revolution and the humanitarian crisis, *palenqueros* have left their districts in Caracas, Ciudad Ojeda, and Maracaibo, producing new maroon-descendant spaces in Panama City. These are districts in Betania, Parque Lefevre, and Río Abajo that have a high population of descendants of Africans enslaved during colonial times—also known as Afro-colonials—and descendants of Afro-Caribbean people who came to Panama City during the construction of the Transisthmian Railroad and the Panama Canal (Lowe de Goodin 2017).

Maroon descendants chose Betania, and its mixed population of excluded people, because of its greener, calm environment, unusual within Panama City's urban landscape with its sense of confinement, labor exploitation, and the permanent threat of deportation that is an obstacle to migrants' free movement. In Betania, the building of a traditional *bohío* (hut), along with practices of socialization and courtship, re-creates the rural spaces back in the *palenque*, dissipating individualism and the lack of warmth perceived by the *palenqueros* in Panama City. The hostile context has affected maroon-descendant rights mobilization.

The development of urban *palenques* in Cartagena de Indias differs politically from the situation in Panama City. There, people from San Basilio de Palenque came to live in Nelson Mandela, Chambacú, El Socorro, and Lo Amador, districts populated by descendants of freed enslaved Africans. In the past, and as remembered in the *palenque*, enslaved people in Cartagena de Indias were allies of the maroons, passing them information about imminent attacks. In modern times, however, *palenqueros* did not last long in their former allies' districts. They suffered discrimination by other African descendants based on colorism, lack of fluent Spanish, and their labor in unskilled jobs, especially women. Women first worked as housemaids and later as street sellers to regain a sense of freedom. Furthermore, the glorified past of maroon resistance against the colonial regime caused envy because it clashed, as explained by Ortiz Cassiani (2006), with the inaccurate historical perception of the passivity of the freed enslaved people in Cartagena de Indias. For *palenqueros*, with their arrival in the city, they became "the *negros* of Cartagena."

In response the *palenqueros* started producing their own territories. The districts of Nariño and San Francisco were later integrated into San Fernando, and other small groups of *palenqueros* established themselves in places like 20 de Julio, La Candelaria, and La Esperanza. The Nariño district, however, created by land occupation, represents a turning point in the development of *palenquero* areas within the city because it became a place for creating awareness of their own maroon-descendant identity and mobilization for their rights.

The political identity that emerged in the urban *palenques* was born as a result of deterritorialization but in vital communion with the rural territories back in the *palenque* and, in particular, with its elders. In the urban struggles of Afro-Colombians in Buenaventura, the symbolic relationship between the city and the ancestral territories has been called an "extended territory" (Lombard, Hernández-García, and Salgado-Ramírez 2021, 15). The phrase "I'm a *palenquero* born in Cartagena. I'm from Palenque, not from Cartagena" describes a sense of belonging to Palenque despite being born beyond its borders in the city.[3]

This strategic communion between *palenqueros* born in different territories is also a legacy of colonial marronage and an example of transterritoriality and fluidity between maroon spaces. In colonial times, when the Spaniards tried to create divisions between the African maroons and those born in the *palenques*, there was a shared understanding of non-separation as a way to prevail (GAI 1693–1695). In the current urban enclaves, people born in the city follow and strengthen practices of living together taught by their elders in the rural territories to mobilize as maroon descendants. These practices include using the *palenquero* language, typical food, music, and dance. The act of having small animals in their backyards also re-creates rural lives in the urban context. Beyond their districts, they frequently deny their *palenquero* origin in public to avoid racial harassment from security forces, White elites, and other African descendants.[4]

The communion that has tangibly and intangibly brought together different generations and territories in the urban *palenques* produces a form of education from *palenqueros* to *palenqueros*. Youngsters from the *Palenque* who arrived in the city to study in the 1970s were awoken by the racism exercised against them and built an itinerant collection of books on Black history in Nariño. Elders, especially women, would use this collection to learn how to read and

write after their chores. Furthermore, the *palenquero* students opened a secondary school at night to continue the education of their elders and other subalterns, who joined the literacy program. They progressively started to see education as a tool that could also bring equality and justice to their people back in the rural territories in the *Palenque*. This vision led to the creation of educational centers where race and Black history were part of their curricula. Colombian African-descendant leaders run these academic institutions. They include some of those young students who took their first steps in teaching in the urban *palenques* in the 1970s. It is no coincidence that the leading educational institute is in the rural core of the Montes de María, where the colonial *palenque* was previously a bastion of maroon resistance.

In these ways, the urban *palenques* started to breach the system of domination, pursuing the recognition of rights as citizens and as members of maroon-descendant communities, in both rural and urban spaces (Zibechi 2012). This mobilization goes hand in hand with the rise of Afro-descendant social groups in the 1970s and 1980s. Afterward, these groups were reunited at the national level in the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (Organizing Process of Black Communities; PCN), whose origins lie mainly in the social and political mobilization of the Black rural communities living in the Pacific region who used Law 70 of 1993 against land grabbing (Wade 1993; Wabgou et al. 2012; Paschel 2018). Law 70 recognizes these communities as holders of ethnic cultural and educational rights and owners of "vacant lands," as stated in the letter of the law, which they have occupied since the last part of the seventeenth century, mainly without title deeds (Romero Vergara 2017).

In 2006, inspired by the land formalization process and their apparent similarities with the other Black communities in the Pacific region, the *Palenque* began a claim for a collective title deed based on Law 70. This process was a collaboration between community leaders in the *Palenque*'s rural districts and members of the urban *palenques* in Cartagena de Indias, some of them lawyers. This work ended with a provisional resolution by the government recognizing 3,353 hectares as owned by the community. This is the built-up area excluding the *montes* (Ministerio de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural 2012; participatory mapping exercises), a landscape that includes hills, creeks, thick vegetation, and wetlands with dry and wet seasons (Tardieu 2006).

It was the *montes* that made colonial marronage materially possible because they allowed maroons, at certain times, to find temporary territorial peace. At the present time they are the agricultural reserve of the community. Despite the exclusion of the *montes*, the title deed was accepted in 2012 to avoid further uprooting. The inhabitants consented to the reality that they would not retain all of their ancestral territory, the Montes de María, which covers around 200,000 hectares. This vision has been changing slowly in the community, however, and new strategies are emerging in association with leaders of the PCN, which cannot be discussed publicly in this article.

The 2012 collective title deed was not the first in the history of the community. In 1921, members of San Basilio de Palenque petitioned for the formalization of their collective lands to counter loss of territory at the hands of White elite ranchers. They based their petition on the land redistribution made by the Spanish Crown in the Colombian Caribbean in 1779 (de Friedemann 1991), by which time their ancestral territory had shrunk due to the establishment of colonial settlements (GAI 1783). The acceptance of less in 1921 and 2012 to achieve the survival of the *Palenque* and therefore as a group finds its roots in the legacy of colonial marronage. During the seventeenth century, as noted earlier, the community adopted the spatial strategy of transforming itself from a place of fugitives into a colonial town of free people. In this transition, they juxtaposed different spatial strategies—opposition and cooptation—that appeared mutually exclusive but together enabled them to continue to exist as a people. The negotiated incorporation into the colonial regime in 1714, with specific political autonomies, stopped their total revolt against slavery but continued the dissident strategy of resisting through movement and isolation. For example, despite agreeing to do it, oral tradition states that they did not return new fugitives who reached the poblazion to slavery.

The physical struggle for maroon survival in colonial times reappears in modern times in the accounts of the production of territories outside Colombia due to a lack of job opportunities in the country. The idea of pioneers opening spaces in remote places, such as in Panama, which later become shelters for other *palenqueros* who continue to flee extreme poverty, recalls the colonial narratives about the

purposes of building clandestine communities of fugitives in the *montes*. In the past, Africans were a majority. Those involved, however, were also of mixed race; indigenous and White women; and indigenous men (GAI 1693–1695). In modern times, the new *palenquero* territories in Panama City also include other subalterns, such as Venezuelans, who escaped from the humanitarian crisis that has befallen their country.

As in colonial times, the expression "being in the *montes*" goes hand-in-hand with the fact of being a maroon (Tardieu 2006). In current times, being a maroon descendant in *palenquero* territories outside Colombia means living emotionally and physically between territories, with "half a body" in Panama and "half a body" in the *Palenque*, and requires a "strong heart" to be able endure the pain of being away from the children who remain in the *Palenque* with their grandparents. During the colonial wars, the maroons battled the Spaniards, leaving their elders and children hidden in safe places. In modern times, the absence of their children recalls the way back home, the need for short-term visits, and the transitory nature of their new settlements.

The main drivers of migration to Panama are, first, assuring children an education in Colombia that will allow them to emerge from the state of dispossession that has forced adults to leave the *Palenque* and, second, obtaining capital to build houses in the *Palenque* or the urban *palenques*. Their territorial fortress is back home. Therefore, some of them follow closely, but from a distance, the land restitution process in San Basilio de Palenque. To achieve these ends, *palenqueros*, as street sellers, need to overcome restrictive migratory controls, and to do so they pass as Black Panamanians or as maroon descendants from Colón in Panama. The majority of them sell *cocadas* or *enyucadas*, which are traditional sweets made with coconut and yam. For men this means changing gender roles to survive economically. Producing and selling these traditional sweets are considered female productive activities in the *Palenque*. Although some men explain that they learned how to make *cocadas* and *enyucadas* in "their mother's belly," their partners teach them in their districts in Panama. They are proud of working independently, "without having a boss," and expressing their culture, through what they consider a culinary art, the *palenquero* cuisine.

Some *palenqueros*, however, highlight that the sense of freedom, community, warmth, solidarity, and unity that they used to feel in the urban *palenques* in Venezuela has radically changed in Panama. Survival in Panama is less of a collective task. In Venezuela they achieved material security, such as owning their own houses, before everything collapsed. For them, Panama is attractive because of the U.S. dollar as a stable currency for saving; everything else is individualism, precariousness, and restrictions on movement. Nevertheless, it fuels the dream to obtain the capital that will permit them to secure territories back home.

The Rural Refugee-Like *Palenques*

This section analyzes the distinct territorialization processes and political priorities of the communities of Rafael de La Bonguita, located within the built-up area of San Basilio de Palenque, and La Pista, approximately 10 km away. These *palenques* were built in 2001 after the forced internal displacement of La Bonga, the most abundant green agricultural reserve of San Basilio de Palenque, caused by the armed conflict. These are therefore refugee-like palenques created as mere survival and coping mechanisms to overcome the loss of a rural lifestyle.

The creation of La Bonga dates back to the civil war between Liberals and Conservatives from 1899 to 1902, also known as the Thousand Days War. Some *palenqueros* left behind the built-up area of San Basilio de Palenque to find a place where the armed violence could not destroy their traditional crops and cattle. They found a green area that they named La Bonga after a big *Ceiba pedranta*, which they found on their arrival and subsequently became the center of the community. One hundred years after La Bonga's foundation, however, their descendants took the same path but this time in reverse, back to the built-up area of San Basilio de Palenque. They again escaped direct violence, which was carried out by the military, paramilitary, guerrilla, and drug trafficking groups and companies that installed their business on unlawfully appropriated land. The *palequeros* abandoned their cattle and the fields that for years had served as their subsistence and as cash crops for sale to Cartagena de Indias and other towns in the Montes de María.

La Bonga's forced internal displacement began with episodes of harassment through the incursion of military forces into their territory as a result of the presence of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia–People's Army in the area due to its strategic location as the door to the Montes de María. The residents of the refugee-like *palenques* also remember certain killings in San Basilio de Palenque that anticipated their forced displacement as a warning of the way violence could escalate. In 2000, La Bonga faced its first forced displacement, but this was temporary and a result of the assassination of leaders of the communities of Arroyo Hondo, Mampujan, and Tamarindo. La Bonga was warned that they were next. On 6 April 2001, the second forced displacement, carried out by paramilitary forces, had long-term effects, including the building of refugee-like *palenques*.

This violent uprooting has generated a level of alienation among the people living in the refugee-like *palenques*, which has made the visualization of paths for change and the restoration of La Bonga challenging. This rural territory is re-created in the refugee-like palenques through strategies for emotionally overcoming forced displacement such as the continuation of practices like palm knitting and traditional religious celebrations. After the direct violence ceased, mere survival in materially precarious conditions, based on making space in rural areas, remains the main political goal for this group of *palenqueros*, similar to the maroons in colonial times and different from the vibrant political mobilization experienced in the urban *palenques* of Cartagena de Indias.

A central question during my time in the refugee-like *palenques* sought to reveal the reasons behind the nonreturn to La Bonga after the direct violence ceased. The return could have become a political objective as part of the broader land restitution strategy initiated in the *Palenque* since 2006. The strong need for a collective title deed appeared after the forced displacement of La Bonga as a way to stop a similar process from happening in San Basilio de Palenque. The loss of their agricultural livelihood appeared over and over again in the refugee-like *palenques*, but the return to La Bonga did not emerge as an urgent collective possibility after the 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army. In Colombia, the return of internally displaced people continues at a slow rate (Shultz et al. 2014; Sliwa and Wiig 2016).

The decision not to return to La Bonga is related to the perception of the lack of measures taken by the government to assure the nonpresence of active armed groups in the area, so that the *palenqueros* will not face a new forced displacement. Although environmental destruction preventing the return of the community did not occur, their community places have been enveloped in a sense of loss that makes the idea of seeing them again unbearable. These places were turned from maroon-descendant territories of resistance into spaces of loss due to the exercise of unrestrained violence. In the case of the Black communities living along the Pacific coast, Oslender (2008, 82) explained that the terror inflicted produces "landscapes of fear"; for instance, the destruction of homes and burning of crops. In this way, fear became part of "mental and physical landscapes" affecting the return and daily life of the communities.

When *bongueros* return to La Bonga, they relive past horrors—for instance, killings in the area and forced displacement—reinforcing the importance of protecting other maroon-descendant territories. Furthermore, in La Pista, the *bongueros* had their first contact with safe and running water, electricity, and mobile Internet. A new generation was born in La Pista with these material conditions. Those who wish to return to La Bonga see these conditions as obstacles to becoming reaccustomed to rural life. Despite this general lack of unwillingness to return to La Bonga, some displaced people from La Pista have progressively started going back in two different ways; first, by growing crops again on their lands during the day but coming back in the afternoon to the refugee-like *palenques* and, second, by trying to build a new life in the old home again. The latter are a minority.

María de Los Santos is one of these exceptions and she goes back to La Bonga, trying to restore the life she used to have there. She remembers that at the time of the displacement she was a trader traveling between La Bonga and other towns. After that, her life changed forever. Among those in La Pista she has made the idea of a return to La Bonga viable. Some men have started following Maria to grow crops and rebuild their houses there. Her story also highlights a trend that, with some exceptions in its historiography (Navarrete 2011; Miki 2012; Krug 2018), has been largely overlooked in the history of marronage: the role of women in maroon political resistance. Territorial reclamation has silently started, led by a woman and a few other determined *bongueros* with the power that the land under their

feet gives them. Mere survival in the context of endemic direct violence caused by the longest still-active armed conflict in Latin America might be the most counterhegemonic act that has been taking place in the refugee-like *palenques*.

Conclusion

Drawing on a new combination of maroon studies and socioterritorial readings, this article has underscored how communities of the descendants of fugitives from slavery have been largely excluded from the discussion of socioterritorial movements even though they have found different manners of producing territories of resistance over the centuries to endure powers deeply rooted in slavery and its legacy. Their absence from these discussions impedes a better understanding of social movements in Latin America. Furthermore, this article has contributed to applying the concept of socioterritorial movement to the spatial resistance exercised by maroons and their descendants, to better grasp the historical development and political purpose of their territorial practices in the region.

Mobilizing as a maroon-descendant socioterritorial movement involves mobilizing from, through, and for the political consolidation of a type of territory, the *Palenque*, a territory of and for freedom, in multiple spaces that allow living marronage in the present. This maroon-descendant transterritoriality re-creates the political vision of the maroon leaders in colonial times of the grand *Palenque* that could have unified the fugitives from slavery in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

Seen in this light, the *Palenque* is a territory that questions traditional views of political space and radical autonomy in new Latin American social movements theory in general and in socioterritorial movements readings in particular. In colonial times, a *palenque* meant freedom and resistance, but as a town it was also a negotiated form of Black isolation that stopped a more significant revolt of enslaved people in the Colombian Caribbean. In modern times, maroon-descendant mobilization as a group and its territorial practices have been permanently nurtured by this legacy as well as the tensions between pursuing their own interests in radical ways and, temporarily and strategically, aligning them with the powerful by playing the system to avoid further deterritorialization. This is evident, for example, in the collective title deed awarded in 1921 when legal recognition of Black territories did not exist in Colombia and in 2012.

During the colonial wars, when *palenques* were destroyed, survivors reunited provisionally in other maroon communities until they recovered power and were able to start rebuilding their own places. On this logic, the current *palenquero* districts in Panama exist as economic responses to structural poverty and are mostly provisional and instrumental, geared toward the strengthening of the life in the maroon rural and urban territories back in Colombia. These territories continue to provide the tangible and intangible cultural territory of maroon struggles, hosting the fight for land restitution and feeding political agency outside its borders.

The refugee-like *palenques* in close proximity to La Bonga recall spatial appropriation as mere survival and show how maroon-descendent territories have been transformed from spaces of resistance to spaces of loss by the action of the state, capital, armed groups, and drug traffickers. Furthermore, these maroon settlements arising out of forced displacement are painful, but strategic, symbols that warn of the importance of actively defending the territory from uprootdness. In the urban *palenques*, territorial defense assumes more politically organized forms through ethno-education programs and activism for rights through the networks of the Colombian Black social movement.

Maroon-descendant multiterritorial mobilization is not only against the state (including its parastate apparatus)—as the natural opponent described by socioterritorial movement scholarship—but against other powers embedded in the legacy of slavery. For example, maroons oppose the White elites who violently operate through irregular and regular businesses in their territories and fragment African and Maroon-descendant alliances by confronting them with colorism and unequal ethnic rights recognition. These powers act against San Basilio de Palenque with the tolerance and acquiescence of the state. The common phrase used by the social movements in Latin America, "*el estado es reponsable*" (the state is responsible), captures the understanding that the state is ultimately accountable for its actions or omissions, with the duty of preventing violence or bringing perpetrators to justice following violence. Using that phrase in relation to San Basilio de Palenque and its racialized subjects, however, risks

covering up the fact that the legacy of slavery has multiplied the sources of violence against the maroon-descendant socioterritorial movement. Where violence multiplies, transterritorial resistance takes place as a political way of living out marronage today. This way of life has been under threat for centuries, remaining almost invisible in academic analysis of spatial struggles in Latin America. The time has come to recognize it.

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ORCID

Ana Laura Zavala Guillen http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9965-3543

Notes

1. The term urban *palenques* was mentioned during an interview with Jesús Natividad Pérez Palomino, anthropologist and *palenquero*.
2. Krug (2018) described the successful Kisama religious and political model of struggling against the Portuguese empire as a meme that inspired resistance in the Palenque de Limón in the New Kingdom of Granada around 1630.
3. Inirida Salgado Pérez, *palenquera*.
4. *Palenquero* language has roots in languages from Angola and Congo and places in Central West Africa and the Spanish language (Schwegler 2017).

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ANA LAURA ZAVALA GUILLEN is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, London E1 4NS, UK. E-mail: a.zavalaguillen@qmul.ac.uk. Her research interests include space making as maroon resistance in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean from a participatory approach in historical geographical research.